DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 502 CS 014 445

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TITLE Increasing Independent Reading Levels Using an Integrated Approach Emphasizing Direct Reading Instruction.
PUB DATE 2001-05-00
NOTE 77p.; Master of Arts Action Research Project, Saint Xavier University and SkyLight Professional Development.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; Decoding (Reading); Elementary Education; *Instructional Effectiveness; Reading Achievement; *Reading Improvement; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Direct Instruction; Phonemic Awareness

ABSTRACT

This report describes a program for advancing reading skills in order to improve reading scores and individual achievement. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in a middle class community located in a Midwestern state. Standardized test scores and local assessment scores revealed that many elementary students were lacking the necessary skills to effectively read textbooks or materials at grade level. Analysis of probable cause showed students lacked skills related to letter-sound association, decoding strategies, and phonics. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a lack of direct instruction in these reading areas for student skill development. A review of solution strategies suggested by experts in reading, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in an intervention plan to supplement the reading curriculum with direct instruction in skill areas. At the conclusion of the intervention, data revealed a significant increase in reading skills of the targeted students. Students had gained reading strategies for phonemic awareness, decoding words, recognizing high-frequency sight words, and increasing individual reading levels. Appendixes contain student interview questions; student and parent reading survey instruments; a phonemic awareness survey; sight word tests; print concepts checklists; and consent letters. (Contains 26 references and 5 figures of data.) (Author/RS)

ED 455 502

INCREASING INDEPENDENT READING LEVELS USING AN INTEGRATED APPROACH EMPHASIZING DIRECT READING INSTRUCTION

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An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

St. Xavier University & SkyLight Professional Development

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 2001

CS 014 445

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Abstract

This report describes a program for advancing reading skills in order to improve reading scores and individual achievement. The targeted population consisted of elementary students in a middle class community located in a Midwestern state. Standardized test scores and local assessment scores revealed that many elementary students were lacking the necessary skills to effectively read textbooks or materials at grade level.

Analysis of probable cause showed students lacked skills related to letter-sound association, decoding strategies, and phonics. Reviews of curricula content and instructional strategies revealed a lack of direct instruction in these reading areas for student skill development.

A review of solution strategies suggested by experts in reading, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in an intervention plan to supplement the reading curriculum with direct instruction in skill areas.

At the conclusion of the intervention, data revealed a significant increase in reading skills of the targeted students. Students had gained reading strategies for phonemic awareness, decoding words, recognizing high-frequency sight words, and increasing individual reading levels.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT 1

General Statement of the Problem 1

Immediate Problem Context 2

The Surrounding Community 7

The National Context of the Problem 9

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION 11

Problem Evidence 11

Probable Causes 15

CHAPTER 3 - THE SOLUTION STRATEGY 19

Literature Review 19

Project Objectives and Processes 31

Project Action Plan 31

Methods of Assessment 35

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT RESULTS 36

Historical Description of the Intervention 36

Presentation and Analysis of Results 45

Recommendations and Conclusions 49

REFERENCES CITED 52

APPENDICES 55

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Children have individual differences, do not all learn in the same way, and vary greatly in their entering literacy levels. The school's task is to accommodate these differences and teach all children how to read. Daily reading instruction has often stressed any approach to literacy that is currently fashionable. The targeted school has experienced whole language instruction, Sustained Silent Reading, the novel approach, and the Accelerated Reading program. Whole language addresses the "whole" of reading, primarily making connections in reading by immersing students in reading. The other methods teach reading by giving the student time to read, but do not address the student who lacks the strategies for reading. Students entering the targeted school at the kindergarten level have had little stimulation with print, have had few experiences to develop prior knowledge, and have had little exposure to reading strategies. Kindergarten instruction at the targeted school utilizes the introduction of a letter per week via a visual/auditory exercise which exemplifies decontextualized phonics. Rigorous and concentrated direct reading instruction is not a part of the school's curriculum beyond the first grade. From second through the fifth grades, the Accelerated Reading program is used to advance and monitor comprehension skills. With only the first grade using direct instruction in reading skills, some students in the targeted school do not master the necessary reading strategies by the end of first grade. Therefore they cannot raise their

reading level through independent reading exercises. Independent reading inventories and standardized tests have revealed that a significant number of students at the targeted school have an independent reading level that is below grade level.

Evidence of the problem's existence includes teacher observation of the students' reading, qualitative reading inventories, standardized tests, anecdotal records, checklists and assessment of writing samples.

Immediate Problem Context

Building Description

The targeted school is an elementary school housed in a one-story, brick building. The building borders with mid to lower middle class residences, cultivated farm fields, and a railroad track. The grounds of the building contain a football field, a baseball field, playground equipment, a blacktop with basketball hoops, various painted floor games, a prairie plot, and a butterfly garden. It is located within one block of the city's major senior citizens' center, and within two blocks of a city park. The main artery through the city is two blocks south of the school so it is in close proximity to restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations, and various businesses. The school is populated by lower middle class families, public housing families and country club families. There is a church directly across the street and another church with a parsonage one block north.

The school was built in 1969 as a middle school being converted to a K-5 elementary configuration in 1982. It consists of three pods, each containing six classrooms. The open classrooms have been closed with the exception of doors.

The three rectangular pods each face a cardinal direction. The hallways adjoining the three pods contain a centralized office directly across from the learning center. The other hallways house resource classrooms and/or offices as well as art, special education, music, and computer lab classrooms. The gym is directly behind the learning center and also serves as the cafeteria. It is also used for all-school assemblies. Student restrooms and drinking fountains are located at the

entrance to each pod. Each pod has two exits from the building.

Classroom A is a self-contained kindergarten classroom located in Pod C on the south end of the building. One classroom teacher provides instruction. An attendant spends four hours in the classroom each day, 45 minutes of which is spent supervising the students during the teacher's planning period. Classroom A has an area with eight triangular shaped tables with six chairs at each table. There is a large carpeted area for group reading and floor activities. There is a small reading area for quiet, independent reading. Both reading areas include a classroom library. At the front of the room is the direct teaching/group instruction area with a teacher's chair and a rug for the students.

The room is filled with books, letters, numbers, pocket charts, a magnetic board, posters, visual aides, math manipulatives, academic centers, and a computer area with an Internet hook-up. One large bulletin board is used to display the students' work. The other bulletin boards reflect the theme of the week and the daily calendar activities.

Classroom B is a fifth grade language arts and science room located in the northeastern corner of Pod A. The room is rectangular with an open double doorway and two windows that face the east. One classroom teacher provides instruction in language arts to a homeroom class for one hour and 50 minutes in the morning. In the afternoon, the teacher provides instruction in science to the homeroom class and two other fifth grade classes during 55 minute periods. A Title I teacher provides instruction that supplements the reading and writing curricula to all students in the classroom during a 40 minute period in the morning. There are five bulletin boards containing scientific information and instructional information for writing, spelling, and reading. The desks are arranged in groups of four to promote cooperative scientific experimentation. There are four carts containing scientific equipment: microscopes, beakers, test tubes, flasks, electrical equipment, and chemical supplies. There is a classroom library primarily containing Accelerated Reader novels and Newbery novel sets. A corner of the room houses the computer center. The

students have access to three computers, two with Accelerated Reader data and one with Internet capability.

Student Demographics

The total enrollment of the school is 330 elementary aged students. The ethnic breakdown is 73.6% White, 10.7% Black, 5.8% Hispanic, and 0.9% Asian-Pacific Islander. Low-income students comprise 60.9% of the student population. The attendance rate is 95.4% with a mobility rate of 21.7%, and a chronic truancy rate of 6.2% with a total number of chronic truants of 21. The average class size is 19.0 for kindergarten (School Report Card, 1999).

Staff Demographics

According to the 1999 School Improvement Plan, the staff of the targeted school includes 18 regular division classroom teachers for kindergarten through fifth grades. There are eight full time equivalent (FTE) aides who assist teachers in kindergarten through fourth grades. The targeted school is both an Accelerated and School-Wide Title I building with 3.5 FTE Title I teachers who cooperatively instruct with classroom teachers in first through fifth grades. Students with IEPs (Individual Education Program) receive services from 2.5 FTE special education teachers. Fine arts teachers, who instruct physical education, art, music, and library for first through fifth grades, are part of a rotational schedule with other elementary buildings in the district. The targeted school has 2.25 FTE fine arts teachers. The staff has a population that is 95% female and 5% male. The ethnic breakdown is 98% White and 2% African-American.

Programs Offered

The school has an inclusion policy for students with learning and physical disabilities. The students who have current IEPs are pulled from the classrooms into Learning Disability (LD) and Mildly Impaired (MI) resource rooms for reading and math. They are included in all

other subject areas.

Grades one through five receive 45 minutes daily instruction, on art, music, physical education, and learning center taught by certified teachers in those fields. The kindergarten teachers instruct fine arts and physical education in the classroom since they are not a part of the daily fine arts instruction.

The fifth grade Title I teacher assists students in classrooms for 40 minutes daily. Since the school is an Accelerated School (high percentage of free and/or reduced lunch students) the Title I teacher instructs all students in the classroom. The kindergarten class receives no Title I services. Both kindergarten and fifth grade classrooms receive MI, LD, out-reach and speech services.

A Drug Awareness Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) police officer comes into the third grade classrooms for eight weeks and the fifth grade classrooms for 16 weeks to instruct the students about drugs.

Each morning and evening a child care service, Positive Alternative for Latchkey Students (PALS), is provided by the local Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Students from the district's Area Vocational Center are assigned to classrooms to assist teachers in instructing students who are having difficulty in certain areas.

An active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) meets monthly to assist the needs of the classroom teachers. A yearly fund raiser is initiated to provide moneys for field trips, live art presentations, play ground equipment, and to subsidize special events of the school such as fifth grade graduation.

The fifth grade boys and girls are given the opportunity to participate in choir and basketball. The choir travels to entertain local organizations and other schools. The elementary schools of the district vie in scheduled basketball games at the local high school.

The district has established an Adopt-A-School program with local businesses and

merchants. The targeted school has been adopted by a national chain grocery store that has assisted in providing funds for special events.

The students in kindergarten through fifth grades participate in the Young Author's Program and grades four and five are involved in Readermania. These expand our Accelerated School emphasis of reading and writing.

Grades one through five have daily instruction from the Accelerated Reader Program. This program is designed to allow students a daily block of time to read silently in a designated book. The student is then expected to take a computerized test that automatically records the comprehension level.

An out-reach teacher is available at the school two full days each week to counsel students who are having difficulty maintaining proper conduct in the classrooms and to attempt to eliminate truant and tardy students.

Title I teachers, assisted by classroom teachers, organize evening activities for the families that center around reading, math, and science.

District

The District's Mission Statement reads: As a partnership of students, staff, and community, we will focus our resources on creating a caring environment which empowers all students to develop their fullest potential and become productive, socially responsible, life-long learners. With the combined efforts of district administrators, teachers, and educational consultants, an intense inquiry resulted in targeting the district's instructional beliefs toward the constructivist theory of learning. The newly developed instructional beliefs and constructivist theory continue to drive instruction in the district. The Academic Expectations align curriculum with the State Standards (Five Year District Improvement Plan, 1996-97).

The district is made up of 12 educational facilities. These include one high school, two

middle schools, seven elementary buildings, one off-campus alternative education program, and one preschool building which also houses a newly developed K-3 choice program. The high school has a total enrollment of 1,483 students with a graduation rate of 73.2%. The pupil/teacher ratio for the high school is 18.3:1, with the elementary pupil/teacher ratios being 14.5:1. The instructional expenditure per pupil is $3,453.00. The average teacher's experience in the classroom is 16.0 years, with 66.3% holding a bachelor's degree and 33.7% holding a master's degree or above. An average teacher salary is $38,008.00 and the average administrator's salary being $61,700.00. All the above teacher information includes specialized teachers in the field of physical education, art, music, etc., plus the regular classroom teachers (Report Card, 1999).

In the 1996-97 school year, the district took major steps to develop a five-year improvement plan. This plan is based on the instructional beliefs and constructivist theory mentioned earlier in this report. The instructional beliefs encompass the following: instruction must be relevant and based on high expectations, climate must foster and encourage risk-taking, students have the right to a classroom environment conducive to learning, instruction must address the diversity of the student and community population, meet the students at their educational level, provide successes that will advance them, provide frequent and consistent positive messages regarding each student's worth and ability to learn; all students should learn and practice the skills needed to work cooperatively, should learn and practice technological skills, respect the physical, emotional, and intellectual well being of others; education of the whole child is necessary, students learn in a variety of ways, good instruction should incorporate a variety of teaching methods to accommodate these styles (School Improvement Plan, 2000).

Community

Centrally located in the midwest, this community is imbued with agriculture, commerce, and transportation. It offers many cultural opportunities not often associated with a town of this

size which consists of a total population of 33,500. The population is made up of 87.9% White, 8.7% Black, and 3.4% other ethnic groups. It boasts a major shopping mall and a historical downtown district. It is enriched with stately Victorian homes, a renovated public theater, and numerous historical sites dating back to the 1800's. There exists a four-year liberal arts college, a regional community college, and a public library. Cultural activities include a children's museum, a symphony orchestra, a civic art center, numerous choirs, and drama opportunities (School Improvement Plan, 2000; Area Chamber of Commerce, 1999).

Recreational and social opportunities include 952 acres of public parks and playgrounds, swimming pools, a water park, golf courses, tennis and racquetball courts, as well as an indoor hockey rink, bowling alley, softball and baseball diamonds, and a public lake and campground facility which provide many recreational activities for the youth of the community. Churches of several denominations and a synagogue are dispersed throughout the community (Area Chamber of Commerce, 1999).

Single-family homes make up a large portion of this community. Recent housing developments have included three apartment complexes, an age-restricted retirement community made of four components, and condominiums. In addition, new custom homes steadily increase in the community. Middle and low-income housing is also available to those who qualify (Area Chamber of Commerce, 1999).

The unemployment rate is concurrent with the national trend which is in the 3-5% range. New "welfare-to-work" programs are in place to train and develop the work force. This was accomplished through team effort by area educational institutions and businesses. The per capita income for the county in 1996 was $19,868.00 (Area Chamber of Commerce,1999).

Major manufacturers and distributors exist in this community. Some include the manufacturing of appliances, rubber, metal buildings, clothing, cast iron, beverages, and art supplies. Industrial parks provide for new business opportunities and give older businesses the

opportunity to expand. Non-manufacturing businesses employ a large proportion of the community's work force. These include a mental health facility, educational institutions, hospitals, a major railroad, and a correctional facility.

National Context of the Problem

Improving reading scores is not a new challenge for educators, but rather has been a major concern for the last decades. The media routinely faults the schools for low reading scores. Politicians are currently using reading improvement as a part of their campaign message. The standardized tests that are mandated for the educational institutions also reflect a decline in reading. Low reading scores are a national educational crisis. In an attempt to fix the reading problems, the nation made a sweep toward whole language instruction. Once the results showed little if any improvement in reading scores from whole language instruction, a push was made to return to phonics.

Research now shows that oral language seems to develop naturally for most children, but reading does not. A comprehensive approach is believed to be needed, "including both direct skill instruction and the activities and strategies most often associated with effective whole language classrooms" (California State University Institute for Education Reform, 2000).

The state of California has long been the forerunner for its innovative teaching methods that are designed to improve reading scores. California has become concerned with reading scores that continue to spiral downward. "Over the last two years California has seen a decline in the reading test scores of its students and increased concern among educators and parents, along with renewed interest and accelerated research into the teaching of reading" (CSU, 2000). In the fall of 1995, California issued a report from the Reading Task Force of the State Superintendent of Schools. The Task Force reported that there was a need to "return to a balance in the way reading is taught". This method of balance must include a systematic approach which includes teaching the system of language and linking instruction to a logical sequential program (California State

University Institute for Education Reform, 2000).

In his article, "Don't Read, Don't Tell," Robert Sweet, Jr., past president of the National Right to Read Foundation, looked at the statistical research presented by both the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) which cite the difficulties that children and adults have with literacy. The NAEP reported in a 1993 study that "70% of fourth graders did not attain a proficient level in reading and did not attain a level of skill in reading considered necessary to do academic work at grade level". Similarly, the NALS stated that "between 40 million and 45 million Americans are unable to read phone books, ballots, or even nursery rhymes. Another 50 million Americans recognize so few printed words that they are limited to a fifth grade level of reading" (Sweet, 2000).

After reviewing the results of the NAEP study by the Department of Education, which show that 40% of America's fourth graders read far below their grade level, President Clinton has initiated the "America Reads" challenge. This challenge calls for increased classroom reading instruction as well as using a phonics-based program. Dr. Duane Alexander, director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) summarizes it in a statement addressing the United States Senate, "the future literacy of this nation directly impacts the well-being of our children and their families in determining their economic prosperity and their global competitiveness" (NICHHD, 2000).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Prior to implementation of the direct reading instruction intervention, the researchers surveyed 27 students in kindergarten and fifth grade. The surveyed students were those from the targeted school and those chosen for participation in the intervention plan. Both Student Survey A (Appendix A), given orally to the kindergarten students, and Student Survey B (Appendix B), given to the fifth grade students, consisted of questions that asked the students their feelings and opinions about how they learned to read and the academic importance of reading.

According to the results of Student Survey A, before the intervention plan took place, 0% of the kindergarten students saw themselves as readers. Of these surveyed kindergarten students, 90% said that their mothers read to them more often than other family members. Yet, as shown in Figure 1, only 1% of these students said that they were read to by their parents at home every night, 2% were read to twice a week, 27% were read to once a week, and 70% were read to only once a month or less. When questioned about their interest in reading, 85% of these kindergarten students had a positive response to reading or being read to at the beginning of the kindergarten year.

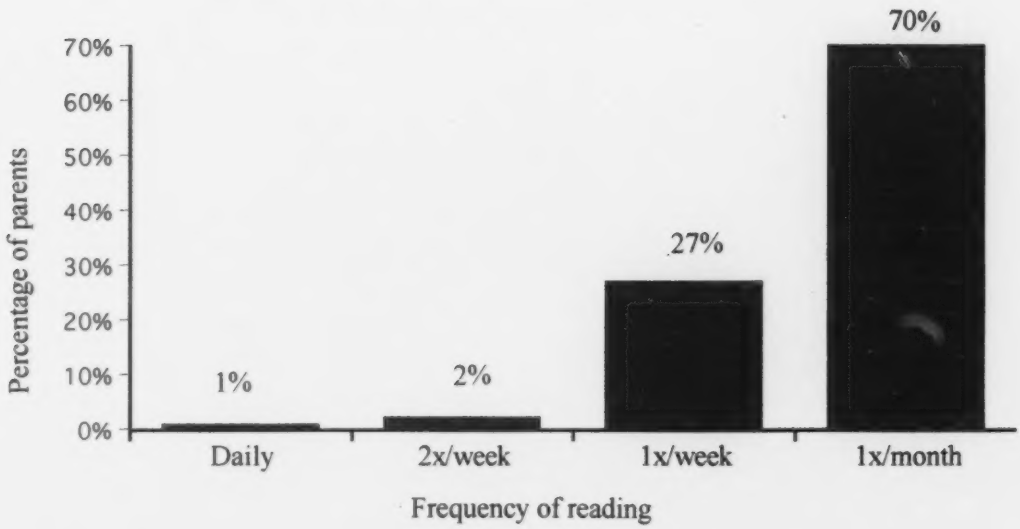

Figure 1. Frequency of parents reading to children at home according to Student Survey A.

The results of Student Survey B showed that 49% of the students viewed themselves as reading at fifth grade level or as adequate readers. Similarly, these same students viewed themselves as having adequate reading comprehension skills. Like the kindergarten students, 64% said that they did not read at home with a parent more than once a month. When asked how they felt about reading, just 18% of the students said that they enjoyed reading for fun. However, as shown in Figure 2, 91% of these same students said that reading as a life-long skill was very important, 9% said reading was important, 0% said reading was somewhat important, and 0% said reading was not important. Additionally, when surveyed about direct instruction in reading, 73% said that they were taught the most about how to read and developed reading skills in first grade. When asked what kind of books they liked to read for enjoyment, 64% of the students siad they like to read fiction books, 0% liked biographies, 27% enjoyed mysteries, and 9% read non-fiction for enjoyment.

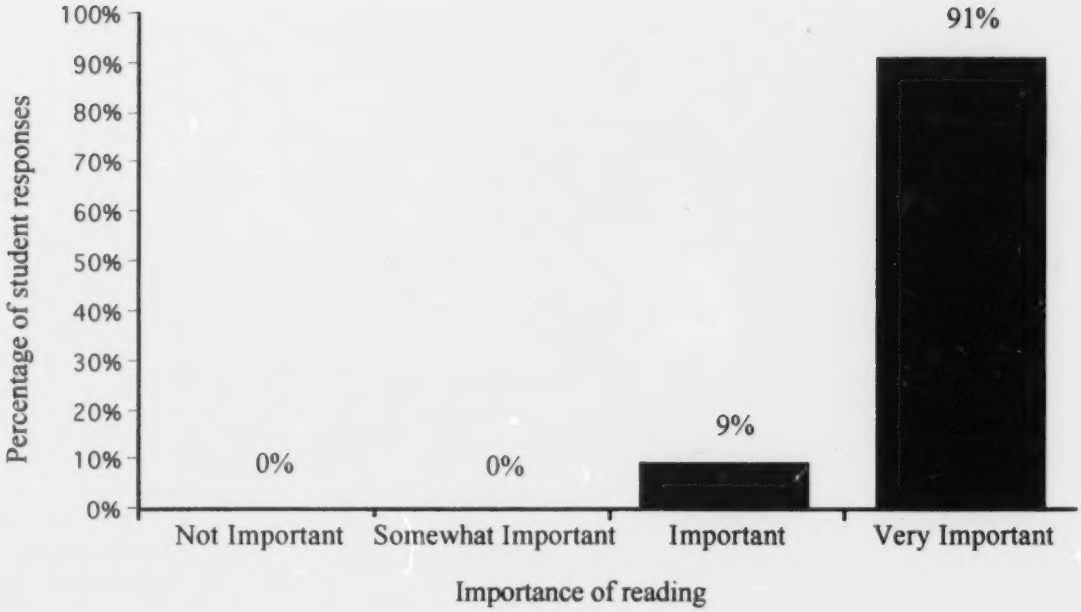

Figure 2. The importance of reading as a life-long skill according to Student Survey B.

The researchers also surveyed the parents of the targeted students in kindergarten and fifth grade at a parent meeting held before the intervention plan began in September. In the results from Parent Survey A (Appendix C), given to the kindergarten parents, 99% of the parents saw their children as nonreaders at the beginning of the kindergarten school year. Many parents conveyed that they had little printed material at home for their own personal use or for the students to use. These same parents believed that their children had a positive attitude about being read to and about reading. However, only 27% of these parents reported that they read to their children once a week or more. A small percentage said that they did not read to their children even once a month.

According to Parent Survey B (Appendix D), given to the fifth grade parents, 50% of the parents viewed their children as reading at fifth grade level or being adequate readers for their age. However, parents said that only 25% of their children enjoyed reading for fun or chose reading as

a leisure activity at home on a daily basis. Also, only 17% of the parents reported that they read at home with their fifth graders more than once a week. Again, similar to the student results, 75% of the parents considered reading as the most important school subject even at the fifth grade level and the most important life-long skill. As shown in Figure 3, 0% of the parents said that their children received the most direct instruction in reading while in kindergarten, 67% said first grade, 9% said second grade, and 24% said third grade. Of these parents surveyed, 92% felt that their children had not received enough additional direct reading instruction in the other primary grades to further develop what was learned in first grade.

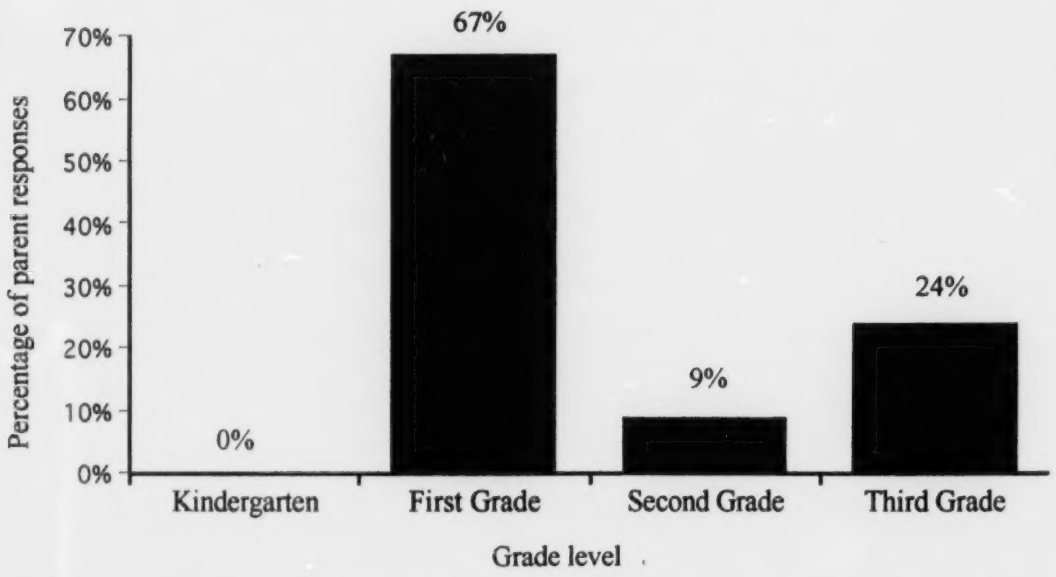

Figure 3. Grade level that provided the most direct reading instruction according to Parent Survey B.

After calculating the results of the parent and student surveys, the researchers concluded that the data collected from these surveys was accurate data because both the parent responses and student responses produced very similar information. This information in addition to results of nationally conducted research promoted the need for the intended intervention plan of direct reading instruction for both the kindergarten and fifth grade students.

Probable Cause

Looking at the topic from a national problem, it seems that there are certain causes why students have not developed sufficient reading skills after completing early elementary education. The major cause is that direct reading instruction is not evident in many elementary classes. In many classrooms, students are given more time to read independently than given direct instruction. Because of this, students do not learn many fundamental phonetic skills that are a key in expanding knowledge of reading. There is mounting evidence that students who are taught reading by direct instruction develop better reading skills than students who are taught by the whole language approach.

According to Allen (1998) literacy should include direct instruction and vast opportunities for exposure to authentic reading. She contends that poor readers have been influenced by a combination of factors, but especially the lack of decoding skills. These are acquired through the direct instruction of decoding strategies, sight words, spelling patterns (rimes), and phonemic awareness.

With the onset of preschools, the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1998) have found a wide discrepancy in the range of what children's literacy abilities are at the entering stage of kindergarten. According to their research, it isn't uncommon to find a five-year difference among entering students. This presents a challenge for the teacher to fit individual needs into the curriculum and make certain that all students are given the skills necessary for success in reading. Teachers who use only whole language may not close the gap.

For decades educators have debated over the most effective method of teaching reading (Vann, 1992). Until just recently and up to now, the debate continues whether whole language or direct instruction is the better method. Vann suggests that the best method between the years from kindergarten through second grade is direct instruction to ensure that students acquire

decoding skills. Vann's theory implies that third through fifth grade students should be taught for comprehension. This does not address the students who have not mastered the skills of reading by second grade and are passed on to higher grades. The skill of comprehension occurs only when the student can read efficiently enough to allow for understanding of the text.

According to Drecktrah and Chiang (1997) phonemic awareness, which is perhaps the single most prominent indicator in the future success of a reader, must be taught by direct instruction. Many students do not automatically enter school with this skill and appear to be unable to catch on without direct instruction. This was especially important for the at-risk students. They contend that whole language instruction lacks the letter-sound strategies that must be learned before students can decode words. Chall (1998) recognizes that direct instruction is most effective for the at-risk students. Teaching phonemic skills through direct instruction to the at-risk, according to Chall, had lasting and direct effects on reading success.

McEwan (1998) researched the results of a program entitled, Auditory Discrimination in Depth which specifically teaches 44 phonemes. The research produced evidence that after using direct instruction in the teaching of phonemes, accompanied with the integrated skills of higher level thinking skills, a significant gain was made in failing students from grades three through 12.

According to Sensenbaugh (2000) children must be directly taught segmentation, blending, and letter-sound relationship. Even though students enter school with a knowledge of spoken language, their cognizance of the fact that spoken language is made up of units of sound is not always evident. Some students can hear these units of sound at the kindergarten level, but many at-risk students were not able to acquire this skill through everyday environmental exposure. Whole-language instruction, unless it includes the direct instruction of phonological awareness, will not bring about the strategies and skills necessary for reading progress.

Reading Recovery, an Australian based reading program, was researched by Colvin (1997) to review its long range effectiveness as a reading intervention. He concluded that the program

failed to use direct letter-sound relationships that a certain portion of the brain needs for processing phonetic deciphering which could effect lasting reading success. The Reading Recovery program, however, did include phonological awareness, syntactic awareness and phonological recoding in its curriculum and taught them by direct instruction which accounts for its current remediation success.

Harris and Graham (1996), strong supporters of integrated constructivist curricula and authentic learning environments, agree that teachers feel direct instruction, of late, has a negative connotation of being bad teaching. They contend that at-risk students, especially, need explicit and structured instruction, not self-exploratory methods, to develop the necessary skills for thoroughly understanding the strategies of reading. Direct instruction, combined with higher order thinking activities, creates a rich environment for reading.

There has been a big surge in our schools recently to have programs that allow considerable time for silent, sustained reading. Researchers, Juel and Minden-Cupp (1999) found that if students did not have the proper decoding skills or sufficient sight words, they were not improved by silent reading. They contend that teachers should be teaching their students several hundred sight words by direct instruction, but they acknowledge that to teach all words as sight words would be impossible. With the addition of teaching phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, concept of words, letter-sound skills, word units, and initial consonants a remarkable difference could be noted. Once the students knew how to combine letter-sounds with what made sense in identifying unknown words, they could combine these strategies along with the sight words that they already knew and positive results could be seen. Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has been mainly used to enhance comprehension. Without the proper instruction in reading skills and the transfer of these skills to text, the researchers determined that little effect was gained by reading to one's self.

Teachers in the upper grades, according to Frost and Emery (2000), feel that

comprehension is of the utmost importance in their curriculum. These researchers concur that comprehension comes with reading ability. They believe that students must become skilled in decoding words, and in using metacognitive strategies in order to master comprehension. Stanovich (2000) agrees with this theory. His research was conducted on the lack of comprehension skills that teachers feel are having an impact on reading progress. His results found that a student's reading comprehension ability could be predicted by the student's ability to decode words at a sufficient speed. He found that sound relationships made the difference of whether a child could decode words rapidly or not. When including adults who had difficulties in reading, he found that they too lacked phonemic and phonological awareness. Teachers who are concerned with comprehension often stress contextual information as a critical influence in reading. Stanovich concluded that the poor reader needs the contextual information for word recognition but that better readers did not heavily rely on contextual clues for comprehension.

Hiebert (1998) makes the point that the text that is chosen for teaching reading has an impact on the reading progress. He contends that teachers who use direct instruction in teaching reading need to analyze the books that are being used for instruction. His research concluded that students who had been exposed to phonetically regular text made significant progress with letter-sound relationships in decoding words.

At present, there are students who are entering fifth grade who do not have the skills necessary to be proficient readers. Our research intends to show that by introducing even small segments of direct instruction in letter-sound relationships, phonemic awareness, rimes, and segmentation strategies, an impact can be made on the majority of students, especially, the at-risk.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

Throughout the twentieth century, educators along with the interested public have debated how children learn to read and what methods of reading instruction are the most effective. In the early 1930's and 1940's, the look-say approach was commonly used in elementary schools. By the 1950's and 1960's the debate began over whether phonics instruction was a better way to teach children to read. Controversy continues at the present time over the benefits of whole language versus direct instruction. While current political candidates debate the benefits and choose one approach over the other, most teachers view their particular method as valid.

Research shows that when teachers across the nation in grades K-5 were asked to evaluate their reading programs using letter grades, the average grade was a B+. These same teachers said that their reading programs were a good mixture of phonics instruction with literature and language-rich activities. Most teachers in grades one through three saw phonics instruction as very important at the lower elementary level. On average these teachers spend at least 55 minutes daily for reading skills or strategy instruction. Additionally, another 42 minutes were spent for applying and practicing these skills. By fourth and fifth grades students were spending no more than an hour for both reading instruction and practice of skills. Likewise while 58% of first grade

teachers use phonics instruction this was true for only 3% of fourth and fifth grade teachers. On the other hand, while 91% of fourth and fifth grade teachers teach reading strategies in the content areas, only 69% of first grade teachers use content areas for reading instruction. Most teachers interviewed agreed that a reading teacher's main goal is to develop readers who were skillful and strategic (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, Duffy-Hester, 1998).

Researchers agree that learning to read is based on complex cognitive, emotional, social, and instructional factors. According to Linda Allen, a literacy instructor at Marquette University, research points to a balanced approach in reading instruction that includes direct, explicit instruction as well as extensive opportunities for authentic reading. She views a poor reader's problem as a combination of factors, but especially that of lacking decoding skills. Allen has developed a literacy plan called the Integrated Strategies Approach which was adapted from research and other successful instructional programs. This framework contains several key components including understanding rhyme, learning to use key words and their spelling patterns (rimes) to read new words by analogy, learning core or sight words, teacher modeling, student application of strategies, and using a word wall (Allen, 1998).

Literacy advocates like the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children view reading and writing as crucial components to a child's success both in school and later in life. Although literacy abilities continue to develop throughout the life span, researchers agree that the most important period for literacy development is from birth to age eight. It is essential and urgent to teach children to read and write competently in a world where verbal communication now demands reading and writing. Teachers now report that the children they teach today are more diverse in their literacy backgrounds than ever before. It is not uncommon for kindergarten classes to include children who have been in organized group settings for three or four years as well as children who are participating in formal groups for the first time. Because of individual and experiential variations,

it is common to find within a kindergarten classroom a five-year range in children's literacy-related skills and functioning. What this means is that some kindergartners have skills characteristic of a three-year-old, while others perform at the level of an eight-year-old. Trying to produce universal outcomes for all of these children can be overwhelming for the teacher who must adapt her program to fit individual needs and abilities (International Reading Association, & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998).

The concern of how to teach children to read has been the course of controversy for several decades and with the widening diversity of abilities and levels it is even more of a challenge. Teachers, themselves, cannot agree to the best practices in teaching reading. Currently, two instructional approaches are under debate: whole language and direct instruction. The whole language method reflects a child-centered philosophy with reading taught in meaningful context. The direct instruction method is an interactive approach in which the teacher emphasizes sequential skills. Phonics, decoding skills, and alphabetic strategies are systematically and sequentially taught in the direct instruction approach whereas in whole language these are not specifically taught but expected to be acquired through the reading of authentic text (Drecktrah & Chiang, 1997).

The term and type of instruction called whole language was developed in New Zealand and promoters of this approach of instruction still argue its merits. These advocates have established support groups, issued newsletters, and sponsored conferences to promote this reading instruction approach. In direct contrast, there are just as many advocates of direct instruction emphasizing skills in phonics. They cite major research studies that support phonics as the best way to teach children to read. Some supporters of direct phonics instruction even say that the whole language movement is just the old look-say approach in a new package. Many experts do agree that the best approach in reading instruction for kindergarten through second grade is by direct instruction. By third grade and continuing through fifth grade, students' focus

should be on reading for comprehension. If children have not mastered basic reading skills by third grade, chances are they will never have the necessary skills to read successfully (Vann, 1992).

Chall, (as cited in Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) who did extensive research in the 1970's, documented results that indicated that direct reading instruction was most effective when teaching reading skills to at-risk students. Chall also found that there were more enduring, long-lasting effects on the at-risk students who had been taught phonemic skills through direct instruction. Peterson, (as cited by Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) who also conducted research on the direct instruction teaching approach, found evidence to suggest that the skills of problem solving and higher-level thinking could be increased through direct instruction while the reading skills were increasing too (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

When using the direct instruction approach in teaching reading, many educators agree that using a whole-part-whole sequence develops good phonics skills and immerses students in good children's literature. The first component, whole, consists of reading, comprehending, and enjoying a whole, quality literature selection. The second component, part, is providing direct instruction in a high utility phonic element using examples from the literature selection. The third component, whole, challenges the student to use the new phonic skill when reading a new literature selection. This instructional approach to reading also suggests using informal reading inventories and anecdotal records in oral reading to assist in determining individual student's strengths and needs. There is strong evidence in the value and importance of using this type of instruction in reading especially at an early grade level and with emerging readers (Trachtenburg, 1990).

Research indicates that phonemic awareness is a strong predictor of a student's future reading success. As the whole-language advocates would have us believe, not all children discover phonemic awareness on their own. Drecktrah and Chiang emphasize, therefore, that it is

necessary to specifically teach these skills. Their research also indicates that direct instruction benefits and is preferred for teaching the at-risk students. Stahl and Miller (as cited in Drecktrah and Chiang, 1997) found in their research that when teaching the at-risk, the whole language approach was, in fact, less effective and that these students required direct instruction in letter-sound strategies (Drecktrah & Chiang, 1997).

The Lindamood-Bell Group was a pioneer in developing a pure phonemic awareness program called Auditory Discrimination in Depth (ADD). ADD is a true linguistic program which teaches students 44 phonemes by a process of discovery, feeling movements of the mouth, and watching these movements in the mirror. Students use color coded blocks to track these phonemes while being engaged in Socratic questioning with the intent to encourage the learner to self-correct and read independently. The ADD program implemented in an Alaskan school district met with much success. Students involved in the program were given pre and posttesting in the areas of: phonemic awareness, receptive vocabulary, word attack, word spelling, written language comprehension, word recognition, and ability to follow oral directions. Of the 229 failing students from grades 3-12, gains were made in all areas of testing (McEwan, 1998).

Another reading program, Failure Free, relies on three key elements: adequate repetition, appropriate sentence structure, and meaningful story content. Its primary goal is to provide a basic understanding of the reading process to students with pronounced reading difficulties. Direct instruction is an integral part of the intervention program. Selected at-risk students are given a 30 minute instructional period with a trained teacher. The reading selection provides high rates of vocabulary repetition in simple sentences without inverted phrases, dependent clauses, or incomplete thoughts that confuse readers. Content of the reading material also includes the use of multiple meaning words and figurative speech. The reading of these controlled passages was designed to improve both word recognition and comprehension performance. The program can be used with individual students or function within the parameters of a classroom with large

numbers of at-risk students (Slate, Algozzine, & Lockavitch, 1998).

Content of the reading material used during reading instruction has also been a controversial issue through the years. Elfrieda Hiebert researched different types of text for emerging readers and what impact resulted. Hiebert believes that there is a decided difference in reading materials and found that text with consistent, common letter-sound patterns was most effective. She advocates that text that contains a great amount of high-frequency words actually deters the student from using letter-sound strategies because of their irregular patterns. She found that phonetically regular words in early reading texts are advantageous for emergent readers. Hiebert's research concluded that the selection of reading texts should be a major consideration in a reading program. She contends that if a little book or primer is written with eight words then only one out of the eight should be a unique word. Hiebert advocates the use of vowel-consonant patterns or phonograms. These are of more importance than rime in choosing a reading program text (Hiebert, 1998).

Educators have debated over the past few years as to whether using phonetically regular text will positively effect reading problems. Hiebert's research was conducted by using two groups. The results from the study indicated that the students who had been taught from phonetically regular text were able to consistently use letter-sound relationships to decode unfamiliar words. Hiebert found that the students used the letter-sound strategies on the beginning letter and continued beyond the first letter when attempting to decode unfamiliar words. Other students who were exposed to high-frequency texts could not effectively recognize an equal number of unknown words as did the first group who relied on letter-sound relationships. Hiebert concluded that this was because the letter-sound decoding skills were not acquired by both groups and accounted for the difference in decoding unfamiliar words (Hiebert, 1998).

Roger Sensenbaugh states that children have acquired spoken language by the time they

enter school at the kindergarten level but this does not mean that children are cognizant of the fact that spoken language is made up of units of sound. Spoken language is made up of words, syllables, and phonemes, the smallest unit of sound. Research concludes that phonemic awareness is a predominant factor in predicting a child's reading success. Sensenbaugh states that phonological awareness is a predominant factor in reading progress whether the teacher selects whole-language or direct instruction. To lead students to success in reading Sensenbaugh suggests the following strategies must be used: segmentation and blending, the combination of segmentation and blending with letter-sound relationship, and systematically sequencing the teaching of segmentation and blending (Sensenbaugh, 00).

Reading Recovery has been touted as the answer to low reader achievement in many schools. Colvin who has researched Reading Recovery, suggests that this program is based on letters, syntax, and grammar. Reading Recovery, according to Colvin, will give an immediate result which leads teachers to think that reading problems have been solved, but he contends that this is just a temporary fix that has no long-lasting effect for long range progress. Colvin concludes that only phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, and phonological recoding can bring about the long range effect that is necessary for a child to continue to progress. G. Reid Lyon (as cited by Colvin) says Reading Recovery promotes the use of picture cues that create activity in a certain part of the brain that does not include a response to letters. He contends that teachers need to expose students directly to letter-sound relationships so the portion of the brain that is needed for processing this activity will be stimulated, thus allowing for greater phonetic deciphering. California is training more teachers in Reading Recovery in spite of some of this glaring evidence (Colvin, 1997).

Many scholars in the theory of constuctivism emphasize the importance of nurturing creativity, higher order thinking, and meaningful classroom activities. While this theory has proven merit, it cannot be used as a single guide for teaching reading, especially to at-risk

students. Many at-risk students cannot learn to read successfully with this type of self-exploratory approach to learning to read. These children require extensive, explicit, and structured instructions to develop the skills needed for a deep understanding of reading. The authors, Harris and Graham, who strongly support integrated constructivist curricula and authentic learning environments, also believe that: We must provide explicit, focused, and, at times, isolated instruction to the extent needed, and integrate it into the larger literacy context. To some critics of direct instruction, teaching is a dirty word. These educators see the teacher's role as assisting students in discovering knowledge instead of explicitly providing knowledge. This approach has serious consequences for students who struggle in constructing knowledge on their own, notably in reading where skills build on other skills (Harris & Graham, 1996).

By second grade many teachers expect students to improve reading skills by silent reading time. The Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) segment is an example. Juel and Minden-Cupp pursued research on what level of skills must be acquired by students before they can start to help themselves in reading. Their research determined that the more words that students have in their sight word vocabulary the more successful they will be at improving their reading by just reading text. Juel and Minden-Cupp believe that to teach all words as sight words would be an impossibility. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the students to be able to sound out words. Most elementary teachers have a goal to teach several hundred sight words to their students. Most of this is done by using direct instruction. But, several hundred sight words would fall short of the required words to allow a student the fluency in reading which would eventually lead to the mastery of comprehension. Even if phonics is added into the scenario, the students would only know approximately 90 rules that could be used in reading text. Juel and Minden-Cupp developed research that went deeper than the use of sight words and phonics. They wanted to know the impact of phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, concept of words, and letter-sound skills. They researched four different classrooms, each using a different approach to

learning to read. Group one used the whole language instructional method. Students were introduced to a whole-class word wall, word chants, and words written each day. They were given no instruction in word units, initial consonants, or whole words. The teacher spent much time on prediction, rereading, and spelling. They spent no time in studying word units, initial consonants, or whole words. Group two used individual little books and charts. The teacher read poems from charts and then the students were given copies of the poems to form a little reading book. The teacher provided manipulable materials in phonemic awareness and phonics. This was done with hands-on activities such as word cards being categorized according to sounds. The teacher adapted the curriculum so as to meet the students at their level of entry. The third group spent much time reading trade books, writing, and using peer coaching for word recognition. The teacher frequently explained the concepts of reread, what makes sense, and a word wall. Phonics was taught through reading trade books. Phonics was not a preset part of the curriculum but the teacher spent every opportunity to teach phonics through the words used in the trade books. Spelling patterns were pointed out as the teacher read. Low and high reading groups spent much time writing in journals. Group four classroom was an environment that was rich in direct phonics instruction. The teacher developed a curriculum that was sequenced in a systematic fashion. The teacher made sure that she spent much time on consonants and phonograms, contrasting short and long vowel phonogram patterns, segmenting words into chunks, and modeling the sounding and blending of phonemes. By knowing the letter sounds and using these strategies, students were better able to decode words and choose words that made sense.

By the end of the school year there was a remarkable difference in the four groups. Group one was reading primer level; group two was reading end of first grade level; group three was reading a mid-second-grade level, and group four was reading a late second grade level. They concluded that at-risk children who enter first grade need to be given instruction that promotes phonemic awareness and alphabetic knowledge. These two factors seemed to be critical to reading

success if they were coupled with direct instruction in phonics. It was concluded that the students needed direct instruction in the segmentation of words and the sounding and blending of individual phonemes into chunks. Once the students knew their letter-sound relationships, direct instruction that modeled how to combine letter-sounds with what made sense made an important impact in identifying unknown words in text. It was noted that not until the student had reached the primer level of reading was there any benefit from extended reading time or SSR. This meant that students who had been advanced to another grade level without acquiring the letter-sound skills would not benefit from SSR (Juel & Minden-Cupp, 1999).

Frost and Emery have researched dyslexic students and found that they have difficulty hearing and/or using phonological skills when processing language. They contend that metacognitive strategies and the alphabetic code should be taught through direct instruction. Also, they believe that explicit, sequential instruction should be given in the segmenting and chunking of words and blending sounds together. The teaching of spelling has become an isolated part of language arts and they feel that it should be taught in relationship with reading. They also feel that teachers in grades two and up are concerned with comprehension. Their research concludes by saying that comprehension comes with reading ability. Until the student masters basic decoding skills, and can decode words, comprehension can not be attained. They believe that teaching basic decoding skills regularly and exposing the students to decodable words until these skills are mastered will lead to comprehension (Frost & Emery, 00).

Kress discusses the assessment of reading, to determine reading levels, that has emerged in our schools today. He reviewed research of the benefits and negatives of Independent Reading Inventories (IRI's) and computer software programs. He contends that the computer software program cannot diagnose the essential components that an IRI can diagnose. The IRI has the ability to individualize the diagnosis of a reader. IRI's can be used to determine the level of independent reading for the student and allows the teacher to become aware of the particular

signs of reading behavior that could drastically affect the remediation of the student. The computer program, however, is limited to assessing only the simplest degrees of comprehension by using multiple choice questions and lacks the element of in-depth assessment by one-on-one running records. IRI's can record miscues and use open-ended questions for more in-depth comprehension diagnosis. They are used to evaluate and determine the levels of reading so that the teacher can choose reading materials that are in the appropriate independent reading level. The teacher can then avoid selecting materials that will create frustration because the material is too difficult. Computerized programs cannot record miscues, utilize open-ended questions for in-depth comprehension evaluation, or provide a medium for deterring the frustration level of the tested student even if the student can answer the multiple choice questions correctly. He concludes by saying that teachers need to use computer programs, IRI's, and a diverse array of tools for assessing reading. But to choose only one assessment that fails to give in-depth information about the process, behavior, understanding, and emotional gauge of the participant would be inadequate. He concludes by saying that a directed reading activity, an IRI, or a personal contact evaluation are essential for reading assessment (Kress, (ERIC).

Stanovich has researched the lack of comprehension skills that are affecting our reading programs. He states clearly that sight word acquisition is a vital component of reading success. He also believes that comprehension is tied into the student's ability to decode words in a relatively quick fashion. His research concluded that the ability to comprehend what is being read can be predicted by the student's ability to decode at a sufficient rate of speed. He has found that the defining variable component in word recognition is sound decoding skills. He also believes that the defining variables in spelling ability is phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, and decoding skills. During his research he worked with adults who had difficulty reading. They displayed the inability to hear phonologically and lacked phonemic awareness. He goes on to say that recent research has given evidence that word recognition of "better readers is not

characterized by more reliance on contextual information. It is the poorer reader who is more reliant on contextual information at the word recognition level". He concluded that this was a result of the better reader having rapid and automatic word recognition, therefore contextual information was not a necessary segment of the reading process (Stanovich, 00).

These researchers have established data on the direct instruction method of teaching reading. The direct instruction approach to teaching reading will be integrated into the existing curriculum to enhance and improve reading scores. The project objectives, processes, and action plan will describe in detail the interventions that will be used in this study.

Project Objectives and Processes

As a result of implementing specific reading skills into fifth grade and kindergarten classrooms during the period of September 2000 to January 2001, the affected students will increase their level of ability in decoding strategies, segmentation, and phonemic progression as measured by project assessment tools.

In order to accomplish the project objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Lessons that require skill building in reading strategies will be developed.
2. Direct instruction of these specific reading skills will be incorporated into each classroom's reading curriculum.
3. Peer mentoring will occur on a weekly basis with each kindergarten student being paired with a fifth grade student to mediate the reading skills.

Action Plan

For the children to achieve the stated improvements in reading, the following action plan was developed. Classroom A contains students in an all day kindergarten program. Classroom B is a fifth grade classroom. These two classrooms will meet on a weekly basis to peer mediate the reading skills emphasized during class instruction. Each kindergarten student will be paired with a fifth grade student to develop an on-going relationship throughout the year. Each teacher will introduce the weekly skills at the appropriate grade level in their classroom by using direct instruction. One goal of the fifth grade teacher is to reteach reading skills that were not acquired by students in earlier grades. The peer program will be centered around student activities that will reinforce these reading skills, with the intent to improve individual reading abilities and district test scores.

Timeline

Classroom A

Before school begins

Send letter to parents and include project information

- Administer parent survey
- Solicit parent consent for students to participate in the project

Week 1

- Administer student pretest
- Administer student survey
- Student interview

Weeks 2

- Introduce, instruct, and apply letter-sound associations

Week 3

- Introduce, instruct and apply decoding strategies

Week 4

- Introduce, instruct and apply phonics principles

Week 5

- Introduce, instruct, and apply word family concepts

Week 6

- Introduce, instruct, and apply punctuation

Week 7

- Introduce, instruct, and apply reading skills in context and isolation

Week 8

- Introduce, instruct, and apply text elements

Week 9

- Introduce, instruct, and apply high frequency words

Week 10

- Introduce, instruct, and apply vocabulary skills

Week 11

- Introduce, instruct, and apply phonemic rules
- (kindergarten - blends, diphthongs, digraphs, etc.)
- (fifth grade - prefixes, suffixes, homophones, etc.)

Week 12

- Introduce, instruct, and apply figurative language

Week 13 - 20

- Continue the instruction and application of above skills

Week 21-23

- Post student testing

Timeline

Classroom B

Before school begins

- Send letter to parents and include project information
- Administer parent survey
- Solicit parent consent for students to participate in the project

Week 1

- Administer student pretest
- Administer student survey
- Student interview

Week 2

- Introduce, instruct, and apply letter-sound associations

Week 3

- Introduce, instruct and apply decoding strategies

Week 4

- Introduce, instruct and apply phonics principles

Week 5

- Introduce, instruct, and apply word family concepts

Week 6

- Introduce, instruct, and apply punctuation

Week 7

- Introduce, instruct, and apply reading skills in context and isolation

Week 8

- Introduce, instruct, and apply text elements

Week 9

- Introduce, instruct, and apply high frequency words

Week 10

- Introduce, instruct, and apply vocabulary skills

Week 11

- Introduce, instruct, and apply phonemic rules (kindergarten - blends, diphthongs, digraphs, etc.; fifth grade - prefixes, suffixes, homophones, etc.)

Week 12

- Introduce, instruct, and apply figurative language

Week 13

- Post student testing
- Post student interview

Methods of Assessment

In order to measure the effects of the intervention, the researchers will assess reading progress by using a variety of evaluation tools. The tools will include: parent surveys, student surveys, sight word tests, phonemic awareness tests, and reading level tests. These will be given at both the start of the research project and the conclusion. These will likely produce data that will determine growth. During the study the teachers will collect anecdotal records to help support the test data.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of the research intervention was to determine whether a student's independent reading level could be increased by implementing certain strategies through the direct instruction method of teaching. The researchers gathered data from their respective classrooms through pretests and posttests. Parent and student surveys were administered to ascertain attitudes, abilities, and habits in reading. The parent consent letters (Appendix I, Appendix J) were distributed at the open house along with a letter describing the components of the intervention.

The researchers included, first, a fifth grade science teacher who taught three fifth grade science classes in a rotational schedule but who was responsible for the language arts acquisition of her homeroom students. The second researcher was a kindergarten teacher whose at-risk students, if taught by the standard kindergarten norms, would only achieve the acquisition of letters and their sounds in a decontextualized phonics system by the end of the kindergarten year. The teachers established weekly strategies and skill builders based on the grapho-phonic system and decided to administer them through the direct instruction approach.

Classroom A

The objective of the action research in Classroom A was to teach kindergarten students to read at a first grade, independent level. A 23 week intervention was initiated in a self-contained kindergarten classroom of 25 students. Due to the high mobility rate of the targeted school only 16 students of the original group remained at the conclusion of the research. Specific strategies were chosen by the teacher to be incorporated into the curriculum. These strategies were taught through direct instruction and included the teaching of graphemes and sounds, phonemes, phonemic awareness, decoding skills, dividing words into phonemes, creating words by combining phonemes, phonograms, consonants, vowels, digraphs, diphthongs, blends, endings, select spelling patterns, and high-frequency words in context.

Since it had long been the philosophy, nationally recognized and utilized, that first grade is the optimum developmental period in which to teach reading the data to begin a high goal reading intervention in kindergarten was uncharted. The teacher first, through various surveys, tests (Appendix E, Appendix F, Appendix H), and questionnaires, assessed the developmental stage of the students who were all of the chronological age five and were predominantly academically at-risk. The assessment of their home environments showed that there was little interaction with print or reading. None of the students knew the alphabet or letter sounds except by rote song. This being decontextualized knowledge the teacher needed to begin the action research at the base-line of zero.

The teacher began explicit instruction to provide a base for the students to develop contextual knowledge of graphemes and auditory sounds that accompanied the symbol. An alphabet chart was made for each student's desk that was used each day to chant the alphabetic letters and sounds while pointing to the specific letter on the chart. Learning these graphophonic cues was to maximize the students' abilities to use them in spelling a word for its pronunciation. There was no introduction of a letter per week due to the need for the students to recognize the

symbols in print early in the intervention. The students were given exercises that allowed transfer from the alphabet charts to articles of print.

The teacher introduced sight words in context simultaneously with grapheme and sound recognition, and concepts of print. Each day sentences were displayed on the chalk board, pocket chart, magnetic board, or writing easel. These sentences were carefully chosen by the teacher. The sentences utilized such high-frequency words such as *the, and, they, we, go, dog, cat, red,* etc. The teacher modeled reading the sentences and required the students to choral read them. The teacher also used these sentences for transferring the students' knowledge of graphemes, transferring their sound knowledge by breaking the words down into phonemes, and for the introduction of phonics components such as the digraph, *th.* The sentences were used to learn print concepts such as directionality, the difference between letters and words, that spoken words are written and readable, the layout of books and pages of print, and the terms that we use to teach reading. The magnetic board was used to make words. The teacher gave the students the ending of a word, such as *oo*, and the students selected beginning letters that made words, such as *boo, too, zoo*, etc. Later in the program students were given core words and asked to separate the word into letters and make two, three, and four letter words out of the core word. Modeling was the dominant method of direct instruction in teaching all of the these skills.

The teacher recognized early in the intervention process that there was a need to establish a different form of decoding than the standard concept of syllabicating. Segmenting words into phonemes became the accepted method of division of words for the purpose of decoding. The syllabic division of words was formidable for the kindergarten students to comprehend. They had insufficient experience with words to recognize the division point. Syllabic division required the ability to decide where one syllable in a spoken word ended and the next began. In the words *awful* and *away* the syllabic function was demonstrated differently. In *awful*, *a* and *w* functioned as a digraph. In *away*, each letter functioned independently because *a* was in one syllable and *w*

was in another.

The teacher also made sure that the graphophonic cues, prompts that readers use to move from spelling to pronunciation, in this case phonemes, were used as a strategy for recognizing words that were familiar orally but not visually to the students. The pronunciation of a word was only possible if the meaning of the word was in the readers' oral vocabulary. For accession of a word, the students' ability to understand the sounded-out word became dependent on the students' knowledge of that spoken word. Within a meaningful text, the teacher wrote a word that pre-existed in the student's vocabulary and the student decoded the word by using the letter-by-letter, sound-by-sound pronunciation method. The teacher always introduced a new sight word in the context of other words that were known. The cues were used in the framework of what word made sense.

The teacher expanded the sight word acquisition even further through the reading of contextually appropriate books. By carefully selecting the appropriate reading materials the teacher could transfer the knowledge of the sight words found in the sentences to additional practice in actual book form. Early acquisition of a number of sight words allowed the students to read from books at an early point in the intervention. The teacher used a circular effect of teaching sight words in isolated sentence form and then transferring this knowledge into book form.

As the teacher modeled the words in the sentences, she pointed out the consonants and vowels, emphasizing the need for a vowel in the medial position. The teacher used diacritical marks to help the students make a decision on what sound needed to be used to attain the correct pronunciation. Digraphs, *sh, ch, ph, th, gh, etc,* and clusters, *bl, br, cw, sl, sp, sn, dr*, etc. were taught along with the diphthongs of *oi, oy, ou,* and *ow, etc.* The teacher taught the *hard* and *soft* sounds that occur in some consonants. These were all taught in context of the sentences which included already acquired vocabulary words.

The teacher also introduced phonograms into the intervention plan. Phonograms are letters beginning with a vowel that form the ending of words. These have been referred to as word families or onset / rime. The teacher began instruction on the two letter phonograms such as *at, an,* and *oo* then continued the exercise until the three and four letter phonograms such as *ook, ine,* and *ight* had been included.

The teacher was careful to avoid teaching the numerous rules of spelling patterns. The teacher, however, had a game that taught about silent e which usually made the vowel long. The students were to act out the difference between mad and made; hat and hate, etc. However, since many of these rules do not always follow as in the case of *have* caution was taken to avoid concentrating on pattern rules. The objective was to teach the students to be problem solvers. The goal was not to verbalize the rule but to demonstrate its use through performance. Trying different sounds within context provided the cue if the students pursued their problem solving strategies.

Games were played that assisted the acquisition of the desired reading skills. Throughout the intervention the students played teacher-made letter, sound, and sight word Bingo, tic-tac-toe, baseball and heads-up, seven-up. The game heads-up, seven-up was played in the standard fashion. Seven students selected seven heads-down students by pushing down their thumbs. The original seven who had word cards in their hands that had been taken from the word wall, called, "heads-up, seven-up". The seven students who were chosen by pushing their thumb down, had to stand. They picked who they thought had chosen them and read the word. If the students read the words correctly, they replaced members of the original seven.

Daily journal writing concluded the daily exercise on direct instruction of reading skills. Each student was expected to write sentences in a journal using invented spelling at the onset but moving into proper spelling by use of the word wall. They were encouraged to use the word wall or their personal copy of a sight word book to make sentences. The students were expected to

progress from sentences to stories as the intervention progressed. When the writing ability of the students arrived at writing stories, the students were given a prompt or they could use a topic of their own choice. The journals were read and edited daily in order to give immediate feedback. The journals were used because the teacher felt that writing and reading co-exist in literacy.

The teacher used a variety of methods to transfer the reading skills to the students' schema. She was cognizant of the diverse difference in learning styles of her students and incorporated multisensory, multicultural, and multiple intelligence methods. Cooperative groups were used to promote the tutoring, mentoring, social interaction, and imbuing sense of security that is needed for many students.

All of the original 25 students were pretested at the onset of the intervention. Since only 16 on the master list remained at the end of the intervention, they were placed in the posttest. The teacher administered anecdotal checklists and teacher-made assessments during the intervention to assess progress, allowing the teacher to amend the intervention to meet the needs of the students.

Classroom B

The researcher in Classroom B began the intervention plan by surveying the students to determine their attitudes about reading for pleasure and in content areas, their reading strengths and weaknesses, and what type of reading instruction they felt was effective in previous grades. Eleven of the total fifteen students in Classroom B participated in the actual intervention plan. Three of the students were in another classroom at the time of the intervention instruction and one student moved from the school before the intervention plan was completed.

At a parent meeting the first week of the intervention, the researcher surveyed the parents of her students to determine if the parents shared similar views with their children about reading and reading instruction. The parents were asked specific questions to verify their perceptions about direct reading instruction and its effectiveness.

Also, during the first week of the intervention, the students were given the Standardized Testing of Assessment Reading (STAR) test to assess the students' Individual Reading Level (IRL) and their Grade Equivalent (GE). Students were also given the first of weekly sight word tests (Appendix G) developed by the researcher consisting of Dolch words and words from Patricia Cunningham's high-frequency word list.

The researcher gave the students four general reading improvement goals to work on over the course of the sixteen weeks as well as the weekly goals of the intervention plan. The goals were to learn high frequency words, to learn one and two syllable words that follow a pattern, to learn to decode polysyllabic words, and to learn to apply strategies while reading and writing. These goals and other activities taken from Patricia Cunningham's Month-By-Month Phonics For Upper Grades were used by the researcher to enhance the direct reading instruction intervention plan for her classroom (Cunningham, 1998).

Following the weekly intervention plan, the researcher used activities that promoted growth in the area of concentration for the week. One activity, Brand Name Phonics, allowed the students to find and use rhyming words with the same spelling patterns. For example, Slim Jim, Snack Pack, and Shake and Bake have the patterns im, ack, and ake. The students made lists of words with the same sounds and spelling patterns such as victim, soundtrack, or retake. Lists from the students were compared by small cooperative groups and then by the whole class to make a master list of the patterned words. For each unique word that a student had on his or her list, he or she received a point. The student with the most unique words or points at the end of the week received a reward chosen by that student. Each week three new spelling patterns were given to the students for making their lists. All master lists were compiled on large paper, posted on classroom walls, and reviewed weekly.

A word wall was used by the researcher throughout the weeks of the intervention plan

for teaching high-frequency words to the students. The students received ten to twelve high-frequency words to learn and use each week. The words were posted on the classroom word wall and kept by the students in portable word walls at their desks for additional access. Under the direction of the researcher, each word was analyzed by the students for its spelling and meaning. The students were encouraged to find these words in text while reading and use these words in essay writing assignments. All high-frequency words used in essays written by the students had to be spelled correctly and used in the proper context. At the end of each week, the researcher tested each student individually for sight recognition of all the high-frequency words listed on the word wall.

Another activity the researcher used from Patricia Cunningham's Month-By-Month Phonics For Upper Grades was Making Words. Making words is a manipulative activity in which students learn to add or move individual letters from a word to create new words. During each week of the intervention plan, students were given a set of letters that made up a mystery word. The students arranged the letters first by vowels and then consonants alphabetically on their desk. For example, for the mystery word, September, students were given the letters E, E, E, B, M, P, R, S, and T. Students followed a series of directions read by the researcher for making the new words. Samples of the new words made from the word September included step, steep, steeper, temper, meter, reset, preset, and pest. After all students completed spelling the words on their desks, the researcher picked one student to spell the word in a pocket chart at the front of the classroom using letters on index cards. Additionally, one day of the week, students worked in cooperative groups to compile a list of words with prefixes and suffixes that utilized the letters of the mystery word. On Fridays, the mystery word was revealed by playing a version of hangman on the chalkboard. The researcher placed the correct number of blank spaces for the word on the board and the students had to fill in the correct letters before the hangman

was completed by the researcher. Finding out the mystery word became the favorite activity of the students during the intervention plan.

Several activities were used by the researcher to improve vocabulary skills with the intention of improving scores on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) administered in April, 2001. One activity for decoding unfamiliar vocabulary used morphemic analysis. In morphemic analysis, the reader can determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word by analyzing its component parts. Because in the English language 80% of the words are composed of Latin or Greek morphemes, it is valuable for the reader to have prior knowledge of root words and affixes in order to find meaning in polysyllabic words. The students analyzed one of the longest words in the English language, pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. To assist students with determining its meaning the word was used in this sentence: Because of his proximity to Mount St. Helens, he contracted pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis. Working with a partner or in small groups, students dissected the word for familiar parts such as pneumono referring to the lungs or micro which means small. After the groups completed their study of the word, the researcher compared the actual meanings of the morphemes with the students interpretations. Students also studied multiple words with the same morphemes such as maternal, maternity, and matriarch (Baldwin, Bean & Readence, 1989).

Using context clues to decipher vocabulary in text was another component of the intervention plan used by the researcher in Classroom B. At the late elementary level, most textbooks give context clues to introduce new vocabulary words. Generally, the clue is in the form of a definition of the word. Students will also encounter context clues in fictional text although the meaning of the new word may not be as apparent in this type of text. One type of context clue lesson that engaged the students used biographies of wild west outlaws. The students searched the text for vocabulary words that were related to that specific time period. Students had to determine the meaning of these words first by using the context clues and then

check the definitions by using a dictionary. This activity was also used when reading expository text in science and social studies classes.

Most of the students in Classroom B were able to follow the intervention plan with the researcher making few if any modifications. If an activity seemed too difficult for a particular student, the researcher would pair him or her with another student to allow cooperative learning to take place. Overall, the intervention plan proceeded over the thirteen weeks as initially planned.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Classroom A

The kindergarten teacher who conducted the research, in order to assess the effectiveness of the intervention, compiled the data from the teacher-made pretest and posttests of a Phonemic-Awareness Inventory, Print Concept Checklist and Sight Word List. Students who moved into the targeted school after the intervention began and those who left during the intervention were not included in the results. Consequently out of the twenty-five original participants, only sixteen students remained in the program. The classroom maintained an enrollment of twenty-five students but students filtered in and out during the entire intervention period.

The student survey revealed that 90% of the students were read to by their mother, if read to by a family member at all. The students were uncertain how often their mothers read to them (time is abstract to kindergarten students). The parent survey, administered at open house, revealed that only 25% of the parents read to their children once a week or more.

The resulting data from the pretest indicated that only five of the students recognized fifteen of the twenty-six alphabetic capital letters. Nine knew less than ten capital letters and two knew less that five. One hundred percent of the students recognized zero lower case letters. One hundred percent of those in the targeted group lacked the knowledge that letters have sounds.

The pretest indicated that there was no evidence of print concepts (directionality, print has meaning, where to start reading, etc.). One hundred percent of those surveyed had no sight word acquisition a shown in Figure 4. Their writing ability was limited to writing their names and this was unrecognizable in twenty-five percent of those surveyed. One hundred percent did not know what a word was, that words make up what we speak, and that spoken words can be written and consequently read.

In January, mid-way through the intervention, the same pretest was administered to the control group and all sixteen students knew all of the capital letters. Fourteen students knew all of the letter sounds. Fifteen students recognized all of the lower case letters. Fourteen students had acquisitioned sixty-two sight words. Two students read fifty-four and forty-six sight words, respectively.

In March, at the conclusion of the intervention, the teacher administered a teacher-made posttest. All sixteen of the targeted students knew all of the letters, both capital and lower case, and their sounds. All sixteen of the targeted students had acquired decoding skills that allowed them to decipher from two hundred six to two hundred forty-eight of the Word List test that is the expected first grade high-frequency reading word list. The results are shown in Figure 4. Sixteen students had mastered all of the specifically taught phonics patterns. They could transfer their knowledge of clusters, digraphs, phonograms, long and short vowels, and used them in words that were indicated in a form of a sentence.

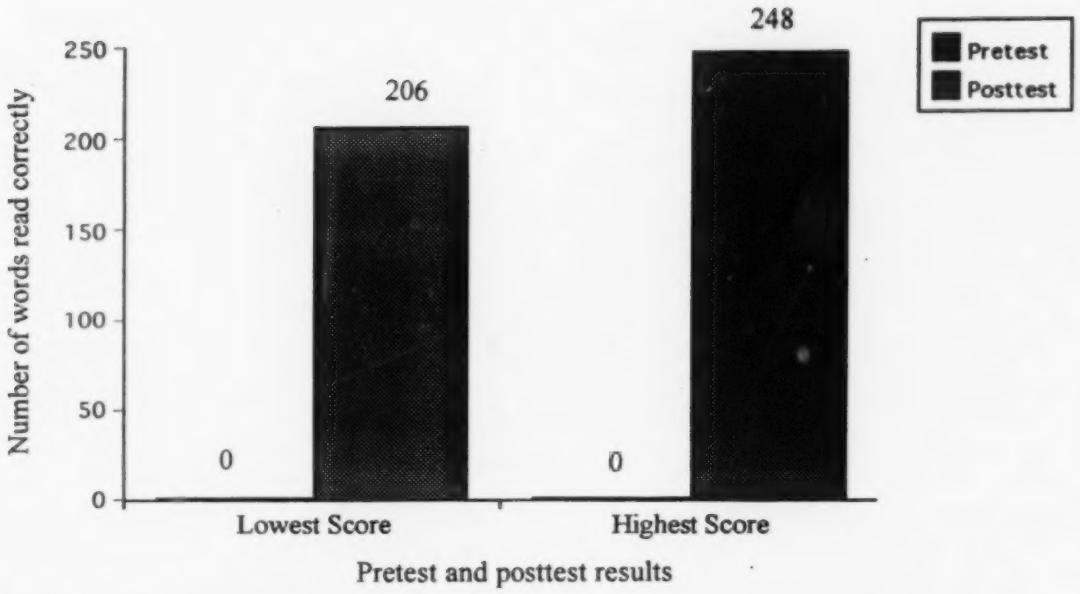

Figure 4. Pretest and posttest analysis of site word acquisition for Classroom A.

At the end of the intervention in March, the 16 original students could read Clifford, Arthur, Dr. Seuss, Madeline, Frog and Toad chapter books, and Franklin, just to name a few books. Numerous parents responded positively to the researcher about their child's ability to read in kindergarten. These parents were amazed at their child's ability to read and were also impressed with the avidity and joy of reading that their child expressed.

Classroom B

After conducting the direct reading instruction intervention plan, the researcher tabulated the results from the STAR pretests and posttests to determine the students' reading growth in their Grade Equivalent (GE), as shown in Figure 5, and their Individual Reading Levels (IRL). According to the data from the STAR pretest, six of the eleven targeted students were reading below grade level before the intervention plan. After completion of the direct reading instruction intervention plan, results from the STAR posttest revealed that only one of the eleven students was still reading below grade level. The results showed that five of these eleven students were

reading one grade level above fifth grade, three of the students were reading two grade levels above fifth grade, and two students were reading four grade levels above fifth grade at the ninth grade level. Likewise, ten of the eleven targeted students improved their Individual Reading Levels.

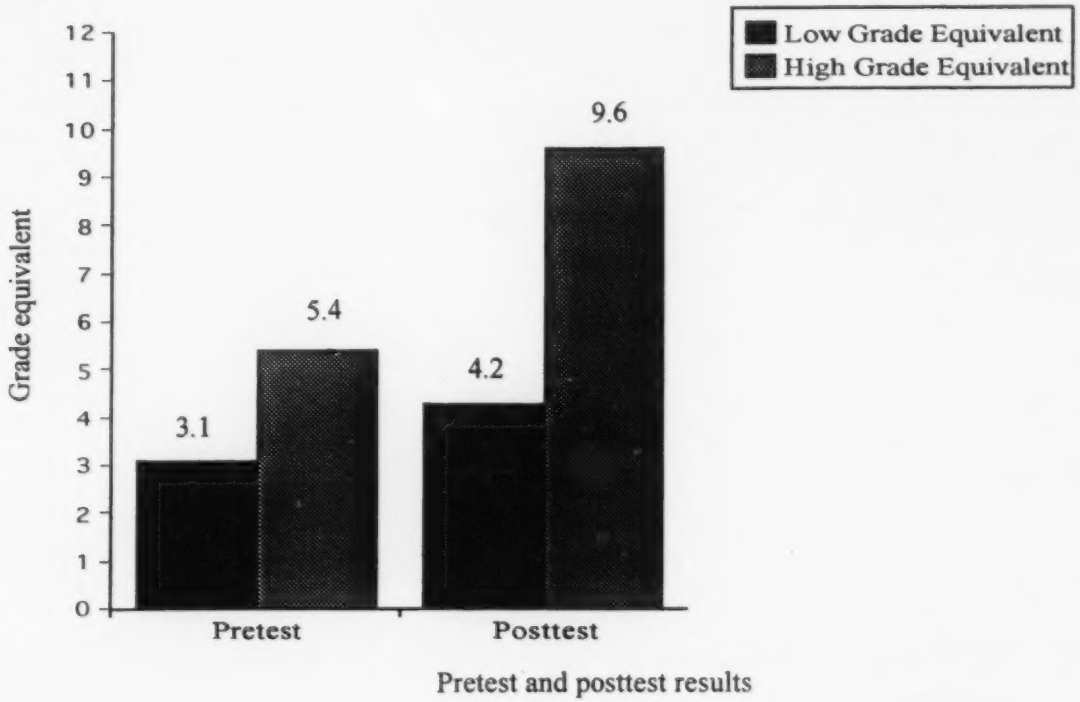

Figure 5. Pretest and posttest analysis of low and high grade equivalence of Classroom B.

The targeted students were given a sight word test consisting of one hundred and thirty-two high-frequency words at both the beginning of the intervention plan in September and at the end of the intervention plan in January. Before the intervention plan was initiated, eight of the eleven students missed five or more of the one hundred and thirty-two sight words. According to the results of the September test, five of the eleven students missed over ten words, three students missed over twenty words, and two of the students missed more than thirty of the one hundred and thirty-two sight words. When these same students were tested in January, seven of the eleven students could read all one hundred and thirty-two words. Ten of these students

missed only three words or less and just one student missed twelve words. The student that missed the twelve sight words on the January test had missed thirty-four of the sight words on the September test. Overall, the researcher saw improvements after the intervention in Grade Equivalency, Individual Reading Levels, and the students' repertoire of high-frequency sight words.

At the conclusion of the intervention plan, the researchers received positive comments about the program from both the targeted students and their parents. Test scores and observations made by the researchers clearly showed that students not only increased their reading abilities, but developed an enthusiasm for reading that was lacking in many fifth grade students prior to the direct reading instruction intervention plan.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The researching kindergarten and fifth grade teachers are very pleased with the results of their intervention of increasing independent reading levels by using direct reading instruction. Baseline data for the kindergarten students upon entrance into the research program had determined that the they started at point zero. The fifth grade students, by way of STAR testing, had revealed students who were reading below grade level. At the end of the action research, data concluded that all of the kindergarten students could read and were reading at the first grade level, could identify at least 206 of the expected high frequency word list of first grade, and could transfer graphonic cues to reading. The fifth grade students, who had been targeted for the program all had improved their reading scores by more than one reading level with some reaching a new level of four years above grade level.

The kindergarten teacher found that the students are excited about their success and read avidly from the school library. These students are encouraging their parents to take them to the public library. They have not only learned to read but have developed a joy for reading that should endure because of the early success that they see in their own abilities. They are well

prepared for their transition to first grade and will no doubt be advanced beyond those kindergartners who were taught a letter of the week with decontextualized phonics. The teacher feels excited and compelled to continue the direct instruction techniques that were instituted into the classroom curriculum.

The researcher strongly feels that kindergarten students are developmentally ready for reading and that to spend one full year in learning letters and sounds is a waste. Hopefully, in the next few years, the school districts will begin to see that kindergarten can be the future first grade, allowing first grade, along with second and third grades, to perfect the reading skills that are already in place and reenforcing those students who did not master these skills in kindergarten. With an added year of reading intervention, maybe the national reading scores will display an overall improvement which is the goal of schools and teachers.

The fifth grade teacher feels, after this research project, that direct instruction has merit. Reading is a sequential process. We start the process in kindergarten or first grade and each subsequent grade level teacher must assess their students, take the students at their entering level and continue to teach and develop reading skills.

The students, both in kindergarten and fifth grade gained a sense of accomplishment and success as well as learning accountability and responsibility for their own reading. They learned with the acquisition of the necessary skills and strategies that they can read or improve their reading level by their own volition. Because of the knowledge that they acquired through direct instruction of reading strategies, they can access these skills and advance their scores. Sustained Silent Reading, Accelerated Reader and other programs that require students to read silently and on their own will become tools for improving the fifth graders' reading but only after the decoding skills have been acquired.

Both the kindergarten and fifth grade teacher will implement this program into their curriculum next year. Direct instruction has proved to be a significant tool for assisting those

students who did not master reading skills before exiting the lower elementary grades. Both teachers concur that teaching phonics definitely should be taught but *how* it is taught is of prime importance. Reading is an interactive process. Grapho-phonic cues are one of three of the necessary parts of the reading process. Phonics, as well as, syntactic and semantical cues are equally important. All three of these should be practiced and utilized within the written text. To isolate these processes from the text obscures the fact that the skill of decoding is important only because it helps to decipher unknown words for the sole purpose of making sense of the text. Students who can not decode, have not acquired a sufficient amount of sight words, and thus struggle endlessly to read the print, have little hope of comprehending a particular text. Comprehension skill builders, such as Sustained Silent Reading and Accelerated Reader can not improve reading in a student who has not mastered decoding. Even proficient readers need decoding skills. The process of reading, we conclude, needs to have a heavy emphasis on grapho-phonic decoding skills presented in context in the early years of elementary education. According to the configuration of the elementary schools, at least kindergarten through third grade should use direct instruction in teaching grapho-phonic skills. If fourth and fifth grades exist in the elementary school they should bear the responsibility of teaching these skills if they find students who have failed to master them by this time. Based on individual reading skills, the introduction of Sustained Silent Reading and Accelerated Reader should be used only if the reader has sufficient decoding skills to read proficiently.

Direct instruction did increase reading levels when the researchers taught grapho-phonic skills with an integrated approach. The data collected from the research could be used as one answer to the nation's failing reading scores. The fifth grade and kindergarten teachers are going to suggest that their research be analyzed and perhaps used as a staff development plan in their district. It is their goal to make every child a successful reader.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Student Interview

Classroom A

Name: _____

Date:_____

1. What are some things you like to do?

2. Tell me about your favorite stories?

3. Are you a reader?

4. What can you read?

5. Who helps you read?

6. Do you have books at home?

7. Where do you read them?

8. Who reads to you at home?

9. Do you go to the public library?

10. Do you like to read? Why/Why not?

11. What do you read besides books?

12. Does your mom read her own book (dad)?

13. What do you think helps someone become a reader?

14. When you are reading and come to something you don't know, what do you do?

15. Do the letters of the alphabet have sounds?

16. What is a word?

17. What is a sentence?

Appendix B

Classroom B Student Reading Survey

1. How do you feel about reading?
A. You like reading a lot.
B. Reading is okay.
C. You'd rather do other things.
D. You avoid reading if possible.

2. When do you prefer to read?
A. In your spare time.
B. At home alone.
C. As part of your class work.
D. At home with a parent.

3. How do you like to read?
A. With your friends.
B. By yourself.
C. With kids who read about the same as you do.
D. With your teacher in a group.

4. What kind of book do you like the most?
A. Fiction (fantasy, adventure, or science fiction)
B. Biographies
C. Mysteries
D. Nonfiction (science, how-to-books, or history)

5. You think the school or public library is:
A. A great place
B. An interesting place
C. An okay place

D. A boring place

6. When you read a textbook by yourself, you understand:
A. Everything you read.
B. Almost everything you read.
C. Some of what you read.
D. Almost none of what you read.

7. When you read a novel in class, you understand:
A. Everything you read.
B. Almost everything you read.
C. Some of what you read.
D. Almost none of what you read.

8. When you come to a word you don't know, you:
A. Skip it and read on.
B. Try to find smaller parts of the word.
C. Guess its meaning from the rest of the sentence.
D. Ask for help.

9. Knowing how to read well is:
A. Not very important.
B. Sort of important.
C. Important.
D. Very important.

10. When a teacher asks you to read aloud in class, you feel:
A. Confident and volunteer to read in front of peers.
B. You like to read aloud, but would not volunteer.
C. You would rather not read aloud, but will if called on.
D. Very nervous and ask not to read aloud.

11. When a teacher asks a question about what you read, you:
A. Can never think of an answer.
B. Have trouble thinking of an answer.
C. Sometimes think of an answer.
D. Always think of an answer.

12. You learned the most about how to read in:
A. Kindergarten.
B. First grade.
C. Second grade.
D. Third grade.

13. When you are an adult, you will spend:
A. None of your time reading.
B. Very little of your time reading.
C. Some of your time reading.
D. A lot of time reading.

14. At home, you spend time reading with your parents:
A. Every day.
B. Twice a week.
C. Once a week.
D. Once a month.

15. You see yourself as:
A. A proficient reader.
B. An adequate reader.
C. A slow, but steady reader.
D. You need to improve your reading skills.

Adapted from the district's academic expectations for language arts

Appendix C

Classroom A Parent Reading Survey

1. How would you rate your child's reading ability?
A. Reader
B. Nonreader

2. How often does your child read for enjoyment at home?
A. Daily.
B. Several times a week.
C. Once a week.
D. Once a month.

3. How does your child feel about reading?
A. He/she likes reading very much.
B. He/she thinks reading is okay.
C. He/she would rather do other things.
D. He/she avoids reading.

4. How often do you read with your child?
A. Daily.
B. Several times a week.
C. Once a week.
D. Once a month or less.

5. What is the main type of printed material in your household?
A. Newspapers.
B. Periodicals.
C. Fiction books.

D. Nonfiction books.

6. In your opinion what is the best instruction in reading?
A. Teacher-guided phonics instruction.
B. Whole language instruction.
C. Balanced literacy.
D. Student-guided reading programs such as Accelerated Reader.

7. When your child needs help reading a new word:
A. You tell him/her to read the rest of the sentence for meaning.
B. You tell him/her the word.
C. You tell him/her to look at smaller parts of the word.
D. You tell him/her to sound it out.

8. Do you think a child's reading ability is:
A. Inherited from parents.
B. Learned through formal instruction at school.
C. Learned in informal settings at home.
D. A combination of A, B, and C.

Appendix D

Classroom B Parent Reading Survey

1. How would you rate your child's reading ability?
A. Excellent/above grade level.
B. Good/at grade level.
C. Slightly below grade level.
D. Poor/cause for concern.

2. How often does your child read for enjoyment at home?
A. Daily.
B. Several times a week.
C. Once a week.
D. Once a month.

3. How does your child feel about reading?
A. He/she likes reading very much.
B. He/she thinks reading is okay.
C. He/she would rather do other things.
D. He/she avoids reading.

4. How often do you read with your child?
A. Daily.
B. Several times a week.
C. Once a week.
D. Once a month or less.

5. What is the main type of printed material in your household?
A. Newspapers.
B. Periodicals.
C. Fiction books.
D. Nonfiction books.

6. In what grade was your child given the most instruction in reading?

A. Kindergarten.
B. First grade.
C. Second grade.
D. Third grade.

7. In your opinion what is the best instruction in reading?

A. Teacher-guided phonics instruction.
B. Whole language instruction.
C. Balanced literacy.
D. Student-guided reading programs such as Accelerated Reader.

8. When your child needs help reading a new word:

A. You tell him/her to read the rest of the sentence for meaning.
B. You tell him/her the word.
C. You tell him/her to look at smaller parts of the word.
D. You tell him/her to sound it out.

9. In your opinion what is the most important school subject?

A. Math.
B. Reading.
C. Writing.
D. Science/social studies.

10. Did your child receive enough direct reading instruction after first grade?

A. Yes.

B. No.

Appendix E

Phonemic-Awareness Inventory

Classroom A

Name _____ Date _____

(circle correct response)

1. Whole Word Discrimination (Are these words the same?)

fat - bat red - rid slip - slit nut-nut

grip - grip mat - map man - man flit-flip

2. Rhyming Word - Recognition (Do these rhyme?)

happy - sappy boy - toy play - game

sad - mad girl - boy sun - fun

3. Rhyming Words - Application (What word rhymes with?)

(Write in response)

man _____ bat _____ sun _____

book _____ bit _____ me _____

4. Oral Synthesis - Blending Speech Sounds (Say each sound slowly. Circle correct response.)

n-o r-u-n t-e-n f-a-t c-u-t

m-o-p m-e s-i-t t-i-g-er m-ou-se

5. Phoneme Isolation (What sound do you hear ____?)

First	Last	Middle
sun	water	feet
foot	roof	tub
yes	pigs	hat
red	ten	hit

Appendix F

Classroom A Sight Word Test

High Frequency Words Record Sheet For_____
Classroom Teacher_____School Year_____

Color	Color	Color	Color	Color
Date_____	Date_____	Date_____	Date_____	Date_____
#Words_____	#Words_____	#Words_____	#Words_____	#Words____

Total words (front and back) 249

Color Words (9)		Number Words (13)	
red	black	zero	ten
blue	purple	twelve	three
green	white	nine	one
yellow	brown	two	four
	orange	seven	six
		eleven	eight
			five

Comments:

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6 some
day
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have
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mother
come
not
like
then

7 get
when
thing
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good
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8 don't
little
if
just
baby
way
there
every
went
father

9 had
see
dog
home
down
got
would
time
love
walk

10 came
were
ask
back
now
friend
cry
oh
Mr.
bed

11 an
very
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12 from
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13 well
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help
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14 boy
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eat
body
school
house
morning
yes
after
never

15 or
self
try
has
always
over
again
side
thank
why

16 who
saw
mom
kid
give
around
by
Mrs.

off
sister

17 find
fun
more
while
tell
sleep
made
first
say
took

18 dad
found
lady
soon
ran
dear
man
better
through
stop

19 still
fast
next
only
am
began
head
keep
teacher
sure

20 says
ride
pet
hurry
hand
hard
push
our
their
watch

21 because
door
us
should
room
pull
great

gave
does
car

22 ball
sat
stay
each
ever
until
shout
mama
use
turn

23 thought
papa
lot
blue
bath
mean
sit
together
best
brother

24 feel
floor
wait
tomorrow
shop
run

25 own
Surprise

Appendix G

Classroom B Sight Word List/Test

about	affect	again	almost	also	always
another	answer	anyone	apply	are	beautiful
because	before	believe	buy	by	can't
celebrate	common	community	compare	could	decide
depend	didn't	different	direct	doesn't	don't
effect	encourage	enough	enter	entire	especially
everybody	everyone	everything	except	excited	expression
favorite	first	friends	forgotten	general	getting
gone	guard	half	happiness	have	hole
important	I'm	Its	It's	into	just
knew	know	laugh	learn	let's	look
medical	meet	mistake	music	myself	new
no	now	off	one	only	our
people	piece	possible	probably	quiet	quite
read	really	require	right	said	school
sign	something	sometimes	special	terrible	that's
their	then	there	they	they're	thought
threw	through	to	too	trouble	two
until	usually	value	very	want	was
weather	were	we're	went	what	when
where	whether	who	whole	with	won
won't	wouldn't	write	yet	your	you're

Appendix H

Classroom A

Print Concepts Checklist

Name:_____ Date _____

	Date:	Date:
Holds book correctly	yes no	yes no
Recognizes front and back of book	yes no	yes no
Identifies title and title page	yes no	yes no
Identifies author and illustrator	yes no	yes no
Realizes that print contains meaning	yes no	yes no
Knows where to begin reading	yes no	yes no
Differentiates words and spaces	yes no	yes no
Differentiates first and last word/letter	yes no	yes no
Reads left to right/return sweep	yes no	yes no
Recognizes difference between words and letters	yes no	yes no
Is developing one-to-one correspondence word match	yes no	yes no
Identifies some basic punctuation (.), (,), (?),(!)		
Recognizes some high-frequency words	yes no	yes no
Uses pictures as cues	yes no	yes no

Appendix I

St. Xavier University

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Increasing Independent Reading Levels Using An Integrated Approach

Emphasizing Direct Reading Instruction

Classroom A

Dear Parents,

As part of the St. Xavier University's masters program that I will be completing this year, I am conducting an action research project with my students. Because of the focus on our nation's declining reading scores and my personal interest in reading, I have chosen to develop my action research project in this area.

This program will be a part of my daily reading instruction and will include participation by all students in my class. Each student in my class will also be working as a peer, mentoring partner with a fifth grade student. I will keep records of the results for my research study, while maintaining confidentiality of student performance. If you choose not to allow your child to participate in the research study your student's scores will not be included in the research records. The grade will not be affected either way.

I am anxious to start my research on teaching specific reading skills to improve and enhance my current reading program. Reading is an essential skill that students need to acquire for success in school and life. It is exciting to have your child involved in research that will lead to better readers. Please read and sign the attached permission slip.

If you have any questions concerning this project, please contact me at _____.

Sincerely

Appendix J

St. Xavier University
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Increasing Independent Reading Levels Using An Integrated Approach Emphasizing Direct Reading Instruction

Dear Parents,

As part of the St. Xavier University Field Based Masters Program that I am completing, I am conducting an action research project with my students. Because of the focus on our nation's declining reading scores, I have chosen to develop a plan to enhance the fifth grade reading curriculum with the intent of improving ISAT reading scores in the spring.

This plan will be used by all of the students in my classroom this year. With parental consent, the students' progress will be recorded in my thesis paper. Confidentiality of students' progress will be maintained and no student names will be used in the research. The student's language arts grade will not be affected by participation in this study.

I am excited about this program because reading is an important life skill and a key to an individual's success both in school and in a future career. The components of this program will be further explained at Fifth Grade Parent Night on Wednesday, September 6. Please read and sign the attached permission slip and return on parent night.

If you have questions concerning this project, please call me at school. The number is _____.

Sincerely,